

The last word Bolivia

by Julianne Burton, Chuck Kleinhans,
John Hess, Julia Lesage

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Alfonso Gumucio Dagron, author of the review of CHUQUIAGO in this issue, has had to seek asylum in the Mexican embassy in Lo Paz. Following a coup on July 17, 1980, the Bolivian military regime has ruthlessly suppressed and killed labor and political leaders, attacked churches, and repressed workers, especially in the mines. The marginal areas around the large cities, delineated in the film CHUQUIAGO itself, have been particularly subject to attack.

According to information from the International Committee in Solidarity with the Bolivian People (78 E. 1st Street, NYC 10009), an estimated 2000-2500 people have been arrested, and hundreds of labor leaders were wounded or killed immediately following the coup. Preceding the coup were national elections (a rare event in Bolivia) with an exceptionally large voter turnout. These elections gave a plurality to a moderately left candidate, Herman Siles Suazo, and the country as a whole appeared to be moving to the left.

The presence of Argentine paramilitary troupes in Bolivia shows Argentina actively supported the military takeover. President Videla of Argentina, who denies any active role in that coup, nevertheless publicly stated:

"The formally correct thing would have been for a government resulting from elections to have taken power, but this represented for us a high degree of risk because of the possibility that it would spread ideas contrary to our way of life and the permanence in Argentina of a military government. We do not want a situation in South America that would amount to what Cuba is for Central America."

General Luis García Meza, head of the Bolivian military regime, echoed the same intent:

"I will stay as long as I have to eliminate the Marxist cancer, be it five years, ten or twenty."

We are reprinting as our editorial a letter sent from the Mexican embassy to JUMP CUT staff member Julianne Burton by Alfonso Gumucio Dagron. It is sobering to realize that left film critics and filmmakers throughout the Third World must face exile for their actions. And it strengthens our resolve to attack the U.S. imperialist system which dominates Latin America. Venceremos.

La Paz, Bolivia, August 23, 1980

Dear Julianne,

I received your letter of June 28th, but was unable to answer it until now because of the events I am about to describe.

On June 29th, national elections were held. The days that followed were spent anxiously awaiting the results. A leftist coalition won with a clear margin, and we began preparing for a new democratic period after almost a decade of military rule when, once again, the military staged another coup d'etat — much bloodier than the preceding ones.

My personal welfare was in serious jeopardy. The leftist weekly *Aqui (Here)*, on whose editorial board I serve, was one of the main military objectives during the takeover. We had been confronting the armed forces and denouncing their plans to stage a coup for almost a year. On June 17th, at the same time that paramilitary forces (directed by Argentine military officials) assaulted the National Union Headquarters and the Governmental Palace, they also took over our newspaper offices.

I went underground. I learned that CIPCA (the Center for Research and Advancement of the Peasantry) where I had been teaching Super-8 film production, had been shut down and that its members were being persecuted. One of the films I was editing, *LUIS ESPINAL AMONG THE PEOPLE*, was in that office. I have not been able to recover it and don't know if I will ever be able to finish it. If I succeed in getting out of the country, I will also have to leave behind my other recent film, *SEÑORES GENERALES, SEÑORES CORONELES*, because I have no idea how to get it out of the country.

Two days after the coup a dozen paramilitary troops, armed with guns and grenades, staged a search and destroy mission at the apartment of my ex-wife, Martine. They interrogated her about my whereabouts, but

since we have been separated for six months, she was able to say that she hadn't seen me for some time. They left, taking with them many of my files, including books of my poetry and several unfinished articles.

Two days later Martine, a French citizen, was expelled from the country with our two children, Sybille and Fabian. Because I had to remain in hiding, I was not even able to say goodbye.

By the end of the week, rather than diminishing, the threats against me had grown more intense. I have a record of having published several denunciations against the armed forces, and the satire I wrote about *la mesa de Garcia* (a pun on the name of the new "president," General Garcia Meza) did nothing to endear me to them. The word was that if they caught me they would make mincemeat out of me.

I took asylum with nearly one hundred others in the Mexican Embassy. We still don't know when we will be able to leave for Mexico, nor do I know what I will do once I get there. I have two three-month contracts to set up Super-8 production facilities in Nicaragua. I would like to finish my book, *Jorge Sanjinés and the Ukumau Group*, but I will also have to find a way to earn my living — hopefully in film.

The article you requested for JUMP CUT on workers' filmmaking in Bolivia would be meaningless now. All such activity has been brought to a halt. The military government has forbidden all union activity and is imprisoning or "eliminating" all labor leaders. The Ministry of the Interior has even ordered the demolition of the Bolivian Workers' Headquarters.

Now it begins for me — this exile phase. I do not know how long it will last, nor what it will hold.

Please write to me care of the Mexican address below until further notice.

Recibe un fuerte abrazo de, Alfonso